



Pick Your Path to Health

What You Need to Know to Quit Smoking

The message is clear: if you don't smoke, then don't start. If you do smoke, then quit.

It's easier said than done, right?

As a first step, consider that quitting *is* possible. According to the American Lung Association (ALA), more than 44 million people in the U.S. have quit smoking.

So what's holding you back?

Why you should quit

Smoking affects your lungs and much more than you might know.

"Knowing the dangers of tobacco is the most important thing in convincing yourself to quit," said Marcella Gaitan, senior policy advisor at the National Alliance for Hispanic Health. "Once you know the facts, your choice is clear: you have to quit."

Did you know that lung cancer is the second leading cause of death among Latinas? This year, it will kill 1,300 of them. Smoking also causes cancers of the throat and bladder and increases the risk for many other types of cancer. It is a major cause of heart disease and significantly raises your risk for stroke. It can also increase your risk for infertility and miscarriage and lead to more serious side effects from menstruation (like menstrual cramps) and an earlier start to menopause.

Fourteen percent of Latinas smoke, and most of them know that smoking isn't cool. Tobacco companies have targeted ads directly to Latinas, showing smokers as attractive, successful, and independent. They also try to depict smoking as glamorous, fashionable, and good for your image. Don't allow this false advertising to blind you to the health risks of smoking. Remember—to the tobacco companies—you are someone who can put money in their pockets.

How will quitting help?

If you smoke, it is never too late to get health benefits from quitting. Within days of quitting, you'll be able to breathe easier. One year after you quit, the increased risk for heart disease drops by half.

Quitting can also protect your family, friends, and co-workers from secondhand smoke. Smoke inhaled by people around you has the same harmful tobacco chemicals. In adults, secondhand smoke can cause deadly lung cancer and heart disease.

"Smokers with children are doing something really dangerous," Ms. Gaitan said. "The effects on your children and your family can be severe." Secondhand smoke is especially dangerous to pregnant women—it can cause lower birth weight and other complications. Children of parents who smoke also have more breathing problems and respiratory infections. Some studies suggest there is a link between secondhand smoke and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

Quitting for good

For most smokers, quitting is hard—but it is possible. Quitting for good takes practice, according to the ALA, and some smokers need to quit several times before they make it.

The good news is that you are not alone. More than 75 percent of women who smoke want to quit. "Support groups and the help of family and friends can make a huge difference," Ms. Gaitan said. "Talk to your family and your doctor about it. There are self-help materials, community-based groups, counseling, and even clinical programs. There are people out there that can help you."

Steps to better health

- Do not allow anyone to smoke inside your home, including yourself. If you still smoke, do it away from non-smokers and children, step outside on the porch or take a walk.
- Research support groups in your area. Call 1-800-994-WOMAN.
- Get strength from others. Ask your doctor for treatment that can help such as nicotine patches or gum.
- Choose a day as your quit day, and tell your family and friends about it. Ask them for help.

- Know your smoking triggers (like always smoking after a meal). Try to replace smoking with something else, like reading, walking or running, or chewing a piece of sugar-free gum, or even writing down your feelings as you struggle to quit. Think how proud you will be reading your story a few years from now.
- Believe in yourself! Even if you slip and have one cigarette, the battle is not over. With support and patience, you can join the ranks of women across the country who have quit and stayed that way.

Start on your path to better health and a longer life today. Quit smoking.

Resources:

- American Lung Association 1-800-LUNG-USA
- Office on Smoking and Health 1-800-CDC-1311 or <http://www.cdc.gov/spanish/tabaco.htm>
- National Cancer Institute 1-800-4-CANCER
- Call to get a copy of *You Can Quit Smoking* at 1-800-358-9295.

Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health education campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, please call 1-800-994-WOMAN or 1-888-220-5446 (TDD), or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov/> To request weekly health tips by e-mail, click on the box that says, "Click Here for weekly health tips by e-mail."